

When Pictures Don't Work:
Comprehensive Communication
Support for Pre Symbolic and
Emerging Symbolic Communicators

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Pre symbolic communication is the first stage
in early communication.

- Developmentally age
0-18 months
- Social / communication
deficits
- Cognitive deficits
- Dual sensory
impairments
- Significant medical
issues



A pre symbolic or emerging symbolic
communicator is someone who:

- Is not yet successfully using symbolic
communication: conventional gestures, words,
signs or pictures.
- May use only limited vocalizations, body language
or motor movements to communicate.
- Needs others to 'interpret' their communication.
- Communicates primarily around things within their
immediate environment.

Developing a FUNCTIONAL Communication System for the Pre Symbolic Communicator

1. Determine **Level of Communicator**.

- PRESYMBOLIC
 - Reflexive / Reactive
 - Pre intentional but Proactive
 - Intentional but not yet symbolic
 - Intentional and Conventional
- SYMBOLIC

2. Build foundation skills for successful communication.

3. Determine **Level of Representation**: The level of visual abstraction that influences an individual's ability to use and understand information. ON THEIR WORST DAY!

4. Provide a COMPREHENSIVE system, one that offers a way for the individual to express their wants, needs and choices and provides information about upcoming activities, activity choices and expectations.

Determining Level of Communication REFLEXIVE AND REACTIVE

The initial stage of communication and social development that involves communication through motor and vocal behaviors.

BEHAVIORS AND CHARACTERISTICS:

- Responds to internal stimuli: hunger, comfort, startle, excitement – Reactive!
- Responses to these states must be interpreted by care providers.

REFLEXIVE AND REACTIVE

INTERVENTION GOALS:

- Provide a consistent response to the behavior – always!
- Develop a receptive augmentative cueing system.
- Avoid random stimulation.
- Reinforce the idea: PEOPLE MAKE THINGS HAPPEN.
- Pair object-symbols with activity, begin to build object-symbol vocabulary
- Wait.....
- Focus on essential building blocks:
 - Gaining attention
 - Acceptance
 - Rejection

PRE INTENTIONAL but PROACTIVE Perlocutionary Stage

BEHAVIORS AND CHARACTERISTICS:

- Behavior is intentional, but is not intentionally directed to a communication partner.
- Communication is all about the here and now! Behavior at this stage exists to EFFECT the ENVIRONMENT: obtain items, protest, reject or repeat action, *maybe* to attract attention to self.
- Behavior must still be interpreted by care provider.
- Behavior is under stimulus control. Change behavior based on response.
- Single focus orientation.

PRE INTENTIONAL yet PROACTIVE

INTERVENTION GOALS:

- Respond to potential communicative behaviors; bring them under stimulus control.
- Target rudimentary turn taking & attending activities.
- Teach CONTINGENCY AWARENESS – I do this...this happens. "First _ then _."
- Build on anticipatory response.
- Begin to id people, activities and items that are R+.
- Pair object-symbols with these items!
- Think of your words as back up to your gestures.

- Demonstrate and facilitate means to end. Hand over hand facilitation.
- Begin to build on distal communication behaviors.
- Document augmentative expressive versus input (receptive) used.
- Wait.....
- Focus on essential building blocks:
 - Gaining attention
 - Acceptance
 - Rejection

INTENTIONAL but not yet SYMBOLIC Illocutionary Stage

BEHAVIORS AND CHARACTERISTICS:

- Uses unconventional signals to communicate about things within immediate environment.
- Can localize to sounds.
- Intentionally gains attention.
- Alternates gaze.
- Request more of an action or object.
- Uses body language/facial expressions to convey like/dislike.
- Changes the signal quality until goal is met.
- Shows anticipation of routine actions.
- Contact communicator.

INTENTIONAL but NOT YET SYMBOLIC

INTERVENTION GOALS:

- Make direction of communication to you necessary!
- Model conventional gesture use and vocal intonations.
- Engage in turn taking activities (complete the "next step" of an action).
- Up the ante – build on the activity.
- Provide contact and interactive choice making opportunities using actual objects and object-symbols.
- TEACH OBJECT-SYMBOLS across environments!
- Redefine method of calling attention to self.

- Work toward maintain body position toward play partner, with occasional self initiated breaks, to demonstrate interest and engagement.
- Build skills to complete a two step action to obtain items, do and undo, and promote cause and effect actions.
- Model use of sign language for basic needs, if appropriate.
- Use visual systems for receptive support.
- Develop joint focus.
- Focus on essential building blocks:
Gaining attention
Acceptance
Rejection

INTENTIONAL and CONVENTIONAL Conventional Illocutionary Stage

BEHAVIORS AND CHARACTERISTICS:

- More sophisticated, conventional gestures used; directing caregivers attention to both themselves and to their topic through gestures (giving, showing, alternating gaze from object/activity to caregiver, open palm out sharing, wave, nod, shrug or vocalize).
- Can communicate about things outside of their immediate environment.
- Use actual objects to communicate: gets keys or spoon
- Distal communicator

INTENTIONAL and CONVENTIONAL

INTERVENTION GOALS:

- Continue to develop gestures through modeling.
- Expose to people using symbols.
- Identify and use symbols across experiences – not activity specific.
- Use existing routines to teach new things.
- Develop choice making skills with distal systems.
- Expand vocabulary and opportunities to practice.
- Target more abstract symbolic levels.

Symbolic Communicators

Concrete Symbolic

- Uses concrete (iconic) symbols to request items and actions within and outside of immediate environment, comment on self, call attention to self, comment on others and reject or stop something.
- Depictive gestures (mine, come, sit). Pantomime.
- Mimics sounds of objects/activities.
- Limited use of signs, photos and line drawings

Abstract Symbolic

- uses single *abstract* symbols to communicate at the single word level.
 - Single manual signs
 - Single line drawings
 - Single spoken words

Formal Symbolic

- Combines 2 or more symbols, signs or words.

BEWARE: Remember, vocabulary should be determined for their **WORST DAY!**

Level of Representation

Most Abstract

Written words

Sign Language

Black and white line drawings

Colored line drawings

Photograph

Least Abstract

Object-symbols

Actual item

Written Symbols

- Coffee
- More coffee.
- I want coffee.
- I want more coffee please.
- I want more coffee please.

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Object-Symbols

Object-symbols are concrete representations of an activity, with attributes directly associated with the activity. Object-symbols feel like, look like, smell like, sound like and/or taste like the activity they represent.



Determining an individual's Level of Representation

1. Reflect on their Level of Communication

- Pre symbolic
- Emerging Symbolic
- Symbolic

2. Observe and evaluate what the person attends to and uses in their everyday environment.

3. Set up a structured assessment

Observe and evaluate what the person attends to and uses in their environment.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> When verbal cues are not provided, how does the person gain information within their daily routine? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are favorite community symbols recognized? |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> What visual information does the person use within their daily environment and community? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can the individual provide you with items or picture of items when named? |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does the individual look through books or magazines and point to pictures? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do they recognize snack packages or do they need to see the actual snack item? |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does the person bring items to you? What are they? |

Set up a structured assessment

Use a more structured environment to evaluate the individual's ability to use visual and tactile information to complete tasks.

Can the individual...

- Pick out items when named?
- Match and sort items by attribute?
- Match objects to objects, objects to pictures, pictures to pictures? Pictures to words?
- Categorize items?
- Use packaging or partial packaging for making choices?
- Functionally use line drawings/pictures?

MATCHING & SORTING

SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT SEQUENCE

Materials:

- Actual Items
- Picture representation of actual items
 - Photographs
 - Line drawing
- Words
- STRUCTURE THE WORK PLACE

Structured Assessment Ideas

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Match same item 1:1 | 3. Sort then match with an item based on a <u>shared feature</u> . |
| • Color | • Color |
| • Shape | • Shape |
| • Size | • Size |
| • Texture | • Texture |
| • Weight | • Weight |
| 2. Sort then match same item. | |
| • Color | |
| • Shape | |
| • Size | |
| • Texture | |
| • Weight | |

Building a Comprehensive Communication System

1. Identify 5 BASIC NEEDS for your communicator.
2. Ask yourself (and the parents /care providers) "If this person could talk, what 20 things would they most likely want to say?"
3. Determine what object-symbols, from the individual's point of reference, would best represent this idea, activity or item.
4. Purchase or make object-symbols for training and use. ObjectSymbol.com

5. Teach object-symbol.

6. Watch for understanding of the item as you discontinue using additional cueing.
7. Begin using the object-symbol functionally for expressive and receptive communication.
8. Continue to build on your object-symbol vocabulary and the individual's overall foundation skills for successful, functional communication.
9. Continue to target essential building block for developing communication skills.

- Develop a FUNCTIONAL way of having the individual communicate their needs / desires
 - A COMMUNICATION BOARD
 - A CHOICE BOARD
- Develop a means of providing the individual information
 - A DAILY SCHEDULE

COMMUNICATION BOARD: Allows the individual a means of communicating their basic wants and needs to you.



EYE-GAZE BOARD: Offers an alternative to reaching or pointing to a board for individual's with motor challenges.



CHOICE BOARD: Offers activity, snack and leisure choices and provides a way for the individual to make their choices known.



DAILY SCHEDULE : Provides an individual concrete information about “what’s next”.



How does the individual

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| ■ Gain attention | ■ Request private time |
| ■ Initiate an interaction | ■ Request an activity |
| ■ Terminate an interaction | ■ Request 'a break' |
| ■ Express pleasure/happiness | ■ Indicate finished |
| ■ Indicate pain or discomfort | ■ Take turns |
| ■ Protest | ■ Make choices |
| ■ Indicate frustration or anger | ■ Get information about what's next and when they will get their requests |
| ■ Request bathroom / to be changed | ■ Get information about what's expected |

Designing activities to promote skill development.

- Does the individual make a decision to engage in the activity by requesting the activity or choosing between at least two offered activities?
- Can the individual make (and communicate) a decision to terminate the activity?
- Is the individual able to engage, at some level, in the interaction/activity?
- Does the individual seem to enjoy the activity?
- Is the activity set up to promote learning or strengthening current skills?

- Is the person allowed adequate time and provided necessary supports to engage in the activity/ interaction to their fullest ability?
- What should be the next activity to further promote skill development and/or independence?
- What leisure activities (independent and social) are being developed for life long enjoyment?

Ways to Increase Interactions and Comments:

- *Do the Unexpected**
- Use LESS words, MORE gestures. We often over talk when others are less verbal.
- Hide things in unexpected places.
- When the individual shares information or ideas respond as if it is the best idea you've ever heard!
- Offer something new
- "Accidentally" make a mistake or forget something obvious
- Pretend something is broken when it isn't-.
- Pretend that you're broken.
- Wear something unexpected.

* Adapted from A. Weatherby & B. Prezant (1988) and F. Sussman (1999)

Increasing Requests

- Place a favorite thing within view but out of reach and be immediately available to assist the person, once requested.
- Offer things in small amounts.
- Give everything needed, minus one piece.
- Offer toys/games that require assistance/interaction:
 - Bubbles
 - Wind-up or squeeze toys
 - Balloons
 - Guess Who
 - Go-fish, War, Uno

- Provide toys or items with missing parts or seemingly “broken” pieces.
- Within a familiar routine, don't do the expected and QUIETLY WAIT.
- Again, use LESS words and MORE gestures.
- Once engaged in an interaction (for example, swinging, feeding, tickling, rocking) – abruptly stop what you're doing and wait for more to be requested.

* Adapted from A. Weatherby & B. Prezant (1989) and F. Sussman (1999)

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING
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Please come by our booth #265 here at
Closing the Gap

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